

## Sermon St Andrew's Lismore 22 September 2019

Job 28:20-27; Luke 8:22-25 (Storm Sunday in the Season of Creation)

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— "Calming the Storm" by Jim Janknegt. Used with permission.

When I became a bishop I received, as gifts, plenty of books on leadership. This was very generous, and the insights that I am gaining from these different perspectives on leadership have been very helpful.

However, I did receive **a lot** of books on leadership: I'm still working my way through them.

My sceptical side says that lots of people thought I would need all the help I could get!

One such book is 12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos. (Jordan Peterson, 2018)

If an aspect of leadership is about avoiding chaos then there are some interesting rules here:

*Rule 5: Do not let children do anything that makes you dislike them.*

*Rule 11: Do not bother children when they are skateboarding.*

The book's aim is to help you avoid chaos.

**Order**, as opposed to chaos, is when people around us behave according to well-understood social norms. Order is the world of social structure, explored territory, familiarity.

For me as a leader, order is my comfort zone. It's predictable, I know what's expected, I feel safe and in control.

**Chaos**, on the other hand, is defined by the unexpected, the unpredictable.

If you are the parent of a teenager, maybe chaos for you is their bedroom. As a young priest in my first parish, I found that chaos was giving the key for the Mothers Union cupboard (in our very well

ordered church hall, where there was a definite pecking order), to the Playgroup Mums so they could access the tea and coffee. What ensued was definitely chaos.

Chaos is unknown territory, it's outside our comfort zones, it's the pain of loss, it's a sick child, the expectation of loss, or the rustle in the bushes at night time, the monster under the bed, the feeling of being betrayed, being out of control, of not having the money for that next Mortgage repayment, it's the place you end up when things fall apart.

Chaos is a storm! Storms are destructive, powerful, out of our control. Despite advances in meteorology, storms are still unpredictable.

The ancient Israelites knew this. Storms represented death, or potential death to them, so it symbolised their worst fears. Their fear of death was also symbolised in the fear of the sea. As a desert people a great mass of water represented chaos and death to them. Put them both together: a storm at sea, represented the culmination of their worst fears.

Things haven't changed really. Being at sea in a storm is still not good, even with our satellite navigation, Air Sea Rescue, and very stable and well equipped shipping. Recently we were on a cruise to New Zealand and the Captain gave one of those Q&A sessions for the passengers. When asked about his scariest moment at sea, he told the story of being on watch one night when a 30 metre rogue wave came out of nowhere and hit the ship head on, smashing the ship's windscreen and flooding the bridge with water. When asked "what did you do?" his response was "I hid under the bench and said a prayer". The chaos is scary and we know we can't confront it alone.

We like to think that the order of the world is our doing. But it's not. The existence and the order of the world is God's doing. It takes a storm to remind us of that.

We might feel out of control in chaos, but in God's hands chaos has lots of potential. Chaos is the formless potential from which God creates *something* out of *nothing* (Genesis 1). In his power, he calls forth order out of chaos. In the Old Testament, storms were symbols of chaos but in creation God can conquer them (Ps 29:3-4), including the forces of the Red Sea in Exodus (Ps 106:9) and rescue those in peril at sea (Ps 107:23-32).

In our Old Testament reading today, Job is trying to make sense of what, for him, is chaos. He has many questions and struggles to find meaning in suffering. He struggles to reach divine truth from his human perspective. All this is chaos and suffering for Job.

The whole of Chapter 28 is a different style, has a different tone and pace, to the rest of the Book of Job. It has been described as a poem. It serves as an interlude from the action and debate of the rest of the book.

This Chapter 28 of the Book of Job tells of Job's search for wisdom. In the verses that we read this morning (28:20-27) we learn that wisdom belongs to God alone.

Job finds wisdom in the calm.

We learn here that humans can search for wisdom on earth but don't find it; we can explore and find treasures of knowledge, but wisdom is beyond our reach without God. Wisdom is located with God alone.

We also learn that God's wisdom is expressed through his work in creation – his work with what we see as chaos: the wind, the waters, the rain, the lightning.

20        "Where then does wisdom come from?  
              And where is the place of understanding?  
21        It is hidden from the eyes of all living,  
              and concealed from the birds of the air.  
23        "God understands the way to it,  
              and he knows its place.  
24        For he looks to the ends of the earth,  
              and sees everything under the heavens.  
25        When he gave to the wind its weight,  
              and apportioned out the waters by measure;  
26        when he made a decree for the rain,  
              and a way for the thunderbolt;  
27        then he saw it and declared it;  
              he established it, and searched it out.

*(Job 27: 20-21, 23-27)*

In the Gospel reading we see God's Living Word and Wisdom, Jesus Christ, speaking to both order and chaos. He is at home on the sea, has no fear of the death it represents, the heaving seas are his habitat, his body rolls with the boat and the waves, his voice stills the storm. In his crucifixion, death and resurrection he knew and conquered supernatural forces even stronger than what the stormy waters represent.

The question he asks the terrified disciples is "Where is your faith?" This is a question for us too.

He is asking where is your faith located?

Is it located in a belief that the powers of chaos are final?

Or is it located in God who is the creator and sustainer of life, who has power not just over the order, but the chaos too? Will we hold onto our faith when future chaos reigns?

So as we celebrate this Season of Creation, and Storm Sunday in particular, we are challenged to seek God and his wisdom and find him through his creative work: the seas, the wind, the plants and animals.

To seek his presence in the chaos. We might not be comfortable there but he can use the formless potential of the chaos of our lives to bring forth something new in us.

The words of Brian Arthur Wren's hymn, with which I'll finish, gives thanks to this wise God whose wisdom 'took its chance on earth, to show God's living way':

*When pain and terror strike by chance,  
with causes unexplained,  
when God seems absent or asleep,  
and evil unrestrained,  
we crave an all-controlling force  
ready to rule and warn,  
but find, far-shadowed by a cross,  
a child in weakness born.*

*Since Wisdom took its chance on earth,  
to show God's living way,  
we'll trust that fear and force will fail,  
and Wisdom win the day.  
Then come, dear Christ, and hold us fast  
when faith and hope are torn,  
and bring us, in your loving arms,  
to resurrection morn.*

God, our Creator,  
as we face the storms of this world,  
we celebrate the wonders of the wind and the weather.  
Help us to see your presence,  
not only in the forces of nature,  
but also among those who suffer from natural disasters.  
Teach us to recognise that your Wisdom is  
embedded in all natural forces,  
a Wisdom that guides, controls and limits them.  
In the name of Christ, your Wisdom among us in human  
form, stilling the storm and renewing your creation. **Amen.**

+Murray

Lord let us make space  
and take time  
this today,  
to be alone with you.  
Let us create  
the discipline of presence,  
Knowing that inner retreat  
regardless of outer  
circumstances,  
is a gift worth pursuing.  
Let us remember  
that in the midst of storms,  
Jesus slept  
in perfect confidence,  
rocked to sleep by faith.  
Let us take courage,  
when the waves swamp us,  
Knowing that to our cries of terror,  
Lord, you respond,  
Peace, be not afraid.  
Christine Sine <http://godspacemama.com>  
Art: Calming the Sea  
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